

Today, Feathered Quill reviewer Diane Lunsford is talking with John Henry Hardy, author of *The Place Where the Giant Fell*

FQ: Arizona captured my heart the first time I visited Sedona years ago. I enjoyed your intro to this story in describing the stark majesty of this high desert country. What is your most memorable moment in exploring this stark land and what makes this memory stand out?

HARDY: It was the moment I stood and gazed out for the first time at the beauty and silence of what seemed to be the loneliest place on earth. Thirty seven years ago, the vastness of the Sonoran Desert was unbelievable for this new arrival from the small State of New Jersey. I love this desert land, but the beauty and variety of desert flora and fauna of this ancient land, with its towering saguaro cacti and tumble weeds, dupes the observer into believing it is a land of serenity and safety. It is beautiful, but death also lurks here for the unwary. Deadly Diamondback and Mojave rattlesnakes rule this land and the bite of a Gila monster proves to be painful and sometimes fatal. Bighorn Sheep, coyotes, and pumas roam the desert, but the deadliest killer of all is the drug smuggler with his weapons and cache of evil wares. Water, water, water, is the vital necessity here, and one can sometimes run across the bleaching bones of illegal aliens, who cross this desert by the thousands each month, but come unprepared and die of thirst in this parched land. However, our Border Patrol and others also save untold numbers of them from this horrible fate each year.

FQ: As a fiction writer, I often say: “There is no such thing as fiction. Rather, the names have been changed and the story embellished to protect the guilty.” What inspired you to tackle the premise of forbidden love between a white girl and a Mexican boy?

HARDY: It was reality—the fact that there are now thousands of mixed racial couples in Arizona and most other states. However, in pre-statehood Arizona the general populace abhorred such practices, but ignored the contribution of the Mexican heritage that is prevalent in our cuisines, architecture, customs, and the fact that many Americans of Mexican heritage also served in our armed forces, in spite of the treatment they received at the time from the dominant white race.

FQ: I enjoyed the depth of this story. You have a natural ability of infusing action and intrigue throughout. What was your approach in getting the story down on paper? Did you have the beginning, middle and end in mind before you began writing it? Do you follow an outline, or do you simply let your pen flow and you follow its lead?

HARDY: Actually, what inspired me to write this story was not just the Mexican heritage that surrounds me, but also my imagination. As a retired Marine Corps officer I like to stay in shape and jog as much as I am able now that I am older, and when I lived in the town of Paradise Valley, each morning I would run down Tomahawk Trail past a house that had a huge saguaro cactus on the front lawn. One night we had a rainstorm, and when I got to that house I was saddened to see lightning had destroyed the cactus. Then every morning thereafter as I jogged by that house, a thought would pervade my mind that this is The Place Where the Giant Fell. I thought about this for years, and over time I had a beginning, middle and an ending in my mind when I wrote this story, but it was all in my imagination only. I never use an outline and just sit before my computer and let the thoughts flow.

FQ: Thank you for your service to our country. I've not had the pleasure of reading your 'Whispers' series, but it seems the platform is the Vietnam War. What compelled you to break away from this theme to write *The Place Where the Giant Fell*.

HARDY: Thank you for saying that and you are welcome. Both of those books were compelling thoughts in my mind for years before I began writing them down on paper. I have other thoughts that I want to write about that are still just mere sentences that I continually think about. The Whisper series is about the Vietnam War, and although the four main characters are fictitious, the war's events are all true facts. I know of the horrible treatment Vietnam Vets received during and after the war-and as a veteran I found it very disgusting, not only for the men but the women who served there as well! That compelled me to write that series. But in order to be an effective writer I think one must be variable in thought-most writers probably don't want to be known to be as well-educated on one subject only. I believe variety is the "spice" of writing.

FQ: In your explorations of the Arizona desert, did you happen upon a real place like *The Place* where characters Carrie and Rodney would clandestinely meet? What was that like? Is it like the location described in your story?

HARDY: Yes, there is a mountain not far from my home that is named Red Mountain and that is how I came up with the name Fire Mountain. It is not far from Goldfield and is steep and treacherous like the one in the story. Of course, the Superstition Mountains are close by too, where the fabled Lost Dutchman Mine is rumored to be located, which I mention in the story. No one has ever found it but they keep looking and blasting away parts of the mountains-which I believe is now illegal. Red Mountain is riddled with nooks and crannies and that is how I came up with that secret location inside Fire Mountain.

FQ: In the world of publishing today, there are many avenues a writer can navigate to arrive at publication. Why self-publish and what has your experience been in doing so?

HARDY: It seems to me that today's literary agents have been spoiled rotten. They seem to turn up their noses at new writers, treat you as though you are an inferior, and unless a manuscript is absolutely perfect-according to their standards-you may as well forget it. They prefer known writers and offer no encouragement, suggestions or anything else unless they feel they can make an easy buck while you do all the work. Instead of giving your work even the slightest consideration, they judge you solely by a letter of inquiry. I got sick of this crap and decided to do it my way! I decided to self-publish and have had some success and I am still working on that and hope for greater progress in the future. The greatest weakness in indie publishing as I see it is that marketing is the weak link; you must be your own marketer.

FQ: When the last word was written, and you knew it was time to set your project free into the hands of many readers, was it difficult to let your characters go? How did you cope?

HARDY: No, it was not difficult at all to let the characters go, since I believe a writer wants to share them with the world; that is why a book is written-to be shared with others!

FQ: There is a strong undertone of racism in this story. Were there moments when you had to take a break from the story line for fear of crossing a line of no return? If so, how did you move your pen forward?

HARDY: I lived in a segregated neighborhood in Trenton, New Jersey until I was about ten years old. The blacks lived on one side of the railroad tracks and we lived on the other. A footbridge spanned the RR tracks, but in the four years that I lived there I only crossed it once, since the black kids (about my age at the time) did not like white kids walking through their neighborhood and it sometimes caused a lot of trouble and tension between people of all ages. In the Marine Corps, I served with a lot of different races and I think this old adage still holds true; if people treat each other fairly you will have very few problems of any kind. No, I had no problem dealing with racism in this novel, since I believe the truth is a very powerful sword. What I wrote about in that novel was how the Mexicans were treated in pre-statehood Arizona. However, the problems we have here today have mostly to do with illegals. In 1994 my present day home was being built, and I took a short leave from the Corps to check on the progress. Not one single Mexican worker framing my house could speak English-only the white foreman could. So the idea illegals only do menial tasks white people don't want to do is pure bull shit. Yes, the sword of truth is a mighty sword, but it also cuts both ways.

FQ: When did your 'aha moment' surface that you are a writer and how do you continue to nurture your craft?

HARDY: I have written hundreds of military news, speeches, air show scenarios, and magazine articles when I was in the Marine Corps, so seeing my name in print was kind of old hat. However, when I received the first bound volume of the "Whisper In My Ear" series it was a defining moment for me. A novel is a lot different than a news or magazine article. It took me years to write the series, partly because my wife is rather ill and has been for the past fourteen years. I am her care taker. She was on a heart pump for twenty two months and it required my full concentration and effort. But as soon as her heart was well enough to come off the Cad Legacy One pump and she could survive on oral meds, I went right back to finishing the series. It was as though I never stopped writing it. How do I nurture my craft? It is my passion and the days fly by so fast when I write that I sometimes feel as though I am growing old before my time!

FQ: It was a treat and pleasure to read *The Place Where the Giant Fell*. Hopefully, you are working on your next and if so, are you able to share some nuggets?

HARDY: I am currently writing and doing research for a novel about aliens from another planet, who are searching for a place to live. They are an advanced civilization and their sun is dying. They are exploring other planets in other galaxies, including the Milky Way, and our solar system. Their knowledge and experience of inter-galactic travel is enormous. Of course, the human race, with its paranoia, greed, and fear of the unknown, deny their existence. These aliens have solutions to many of the problems and diseases that still plague Earth, but the United States fears they are agents from other countries, who might be assembling nuclear weapons on American soil, with the intent of conquering the US. The title of this new novel is *The Phantom Effect*. The essence of this title will be revealed in the completed novel sometime this year.